

Scenario ; an elaborated Synopsis in which the whole picture is visualised and set forth but not split up into scene numbers as in the shooting script or scenario.

TRIPOD : The stand on which the camera rests in a static position.

TROLLEY : A movable tripod stand.

TRUCK : A mobile sound or light unit, mounted in a car. There are therefore two kinds of trucks—the Sound Truck and the Light Truck.

UNIT MANAGER : *See* Production Manager.

VAULT (FILM) : *See* Safe.

VIGNETTE : A soft-outlined mask placed in front of the lens ; often made of black gauze or voile.

VISTA SHOT : *See* Distance Shot.

WINDER : An apparatus for winding films into reels.

WIPE : An alternative to a Dissolve or Mix ; the effect of a Wipe is as if an invisible roller were passing over the screen, wiping out one picture and revealing the next scene. There are several variants.

APPENDICES

COMMERCIAL CUTTING

BY

IAN DALRYMPLE

(*Supervising Film Editor, Gaumont-British Picture Corporation and Gainsborough Pictures, Ltd.*)

One has only to watch Mr. Dalrymple at work—silent and determined and never *audibly* cursing the director—to realise that here is an editor who cannot be beaten by the hardest problem of cutting. He proceeds rather in the manner of a chess champion playing against time—which is why he is the super “commercial” Editor. Study closely his most interesting notes and compare them with his films ; amongst his recent pictures are “Sunshine Susie,” “Jack’s the Boy,” “There Goes the Bride,” “The Frightened Lady,” and “The Prince of Wales.” Mr. Dalrymple is responsible for the final edition of all the products of the Gaumont-British and Gainsborough Companies (from “Rome Express” onwards).

A. B.

WHEN asked by Mr. Adrian Brunel to write a short review of film editing, I proposed, as the easiest way out of this difficulty, to describe the organisation of the cutting-room in a modern film studio. Mr. Brunel welcomed my suggestion with his usual kindness and tact ; but hastily sent me Mr. Hankinson’s article to show that this had already been done. Therefore the best I can do is to offer a few random remarks on film editing in general.

I am glad to notice that Mr. Brunel has dealt with that unfortunate word *montage*, but I doubt if he has accurately described it. *Montage* is something that happens to Russian films, a few German and French pictures, and the entire output of the Empire Marketing Board. All other films are "cut"—a fact that I regret personally, because, when cutting sound tracks, I like to think I am indulging in the practice described so euphoniously on French Credit Titles as *montage sonore*.

Cutting is a means to an end. There is much virtue in wise practice of the art, as in all forms of dramatic construction; but it should never be forgotten that the cutter's duty is to put on the screen in the clearest, most emphatic and most effective manner the material photographed for him under the instructions of the director. He may, of course, eliminate here and (if he has the material) amplify there; he may cover up defects here and underline a point there, at his discretion; he may use parts of shots that were not intended for such use if they obviously improve the smoothness, continuity or the drama.

To such a degree the cutting-room may be described as an assembly plant, a power station, and sometimes even a hospital. It is an assembly plant in that the scenes photographed may be regarded in a sense as parts of a mechanism. It is a power station because, until the speed, *tempo*, or what you will, is infused into the assembled material, the film is something dull and lifeless. It is sometimes a hospital, inasmuch as unpromising material, by clever manipulation, becomes a saleable proposition instead of another little investment gone wrong: though I am glad to say that the merely curative aspect of the cutter's work is yielding to better scenarios and better direction.

Let us now go into the cutting-room for a moment. The equipment of a cutter consists of his moviola, synchronous winders, disc winders, desk lights, combined film racks and bins, scissors, grease pencils for marking film, continuity sheets explaining action, dialogue and other particulars, script to tell him what the film ought to have been about, rush sheets with his own notes, clips, india-rubber bands, and a two-foot ruler; and, finally, an assistant to keep his cut-outs, hold his film, re-wind his film, mark his cans, run his errands, cut his track to match his picture (if he's high-hat and lazy like some American cutters), and finally to listen and keep to himself the thousand and one abusive remarks he has to hear concerning the director and all his works.

The cutter has already seen his material once or twice in a theatre, and may already have an idea of where roughly he intends to make his cuts. (The director sometimes also has a very rough idea, but as the film works out his scheme is often impossible. Either the action doesn't match or the dialogue is differently timed in the various shots or the cut simply isn't smooth.) Of course there are many opinions as to what constitutes smoothness, but I personally have found that a smooth dialogue cut conceals many a poor picture match. As a principle it is fairly safe to cut sharp after a sentence.

Many people make a fetish of cutting *on a movement*, but again I personally have found that the cut is smoother eight times out of ten on the *end* of a movement. It is largely a matter for individual choice in each individual case, and only experience can give you the knack. If only you can teach yourself to follow significant action, and, as it were, of necessity topple over into the next shot, making the cut seem so inevitable that to the uninitiated there appears to be no cut at all—either

because the two shots thus connected present a smooth continuous action, or because the second shot is so emphasised by the cut that the mind accepts this underlining as an inevitable link in the story, and thus again it appears as logical continuity to be absorbed without question.

Other considerations to bear in mind are as follows :

1. Establish your set clearly so that the audience knows what's happening where.
2. Make what you can of the "production angle." Don't let the company spend a mass of money on a set and play the whole action in close-up.
3. At the same time, don't waste screen. Come in as close as you can for significant dialogue, reactions, etc.
4. Put over one thing at a time quite clearly and in logical order.
5. Make up your mind as to the plausibility of screen timing. Don't be hide-bound by considerations of actual time.
6. Make up your mind what precisely you are attempting to put over. Have absolutely no doubt about this. If the script or direction is hazy on the point, make up its mind for it. Sometimes you will find yourself putting over something not quite intended by the script, and it may be that your interpretation is more sound. In any case, if you yourself are in doubt as to the precise interpretation of what the director has put on the screen, or have mistaken it and find yourself trying to register something else, ten to one the audience would find itself in the same situation.
7. Don't bother *too much* about exactness of match, provided that the *tempo* of your cut is right. If the cut seems inevitable, ten to one the audience will not notice incorrectness of detail. This is not to belittle the work of the Floor Secretary, who is responsible for getting all details correct, but illustrates the vast importance of that work. The details **SHOULD** be right. In every shot the same action should be done at the same point with the same arm, leg, hand and so forth. The same dialogue should be spoken at precisely the same moment and likewise finish. This facilitates good cutting.
8. If dialogue is wrongly timed and so conflicts with a good cut, or if the cut is made difficult by actors speaking too quickly one to another, it is often possible to amend this by stopping the track at the cut and inserting blank film. Preliminary mouthings—those really belonging to the sentence just spoken in the previous shot—are often noticeable on the beginning of the new shot, at least for a few frames.
9. Never begin the first modulations of a new sound track sharp on the cut. Start your picture first for a few frames, as the brain does not work sufficiently quickly to follow two things at once, and the effect given is a jerky picture cut combined with wrong dialogue spacing.
10. In normal cases it is good to cut sharp on the last word of a sentence, possibly while the modulations are still in evidence, unless it is particularly desired to preserve a glance on the face of the speaker after he has spoken. This gives good *tempo*, by eliminating a feeling of superfluous footage.

provided that the *tempo* of your cut is right. If the cut seems inevitable, ten to one the audience will not notice incorrectness of detail. This is not to belittle the work of the Floor Secretary, who is responsible for getting all details correct, but illustrates the vast importance of that work. The details **SHOULD** be right. In every shot the same action should be done at the same point with the same arm, leg, hand and so forth. The same dialogue should be spoken at precisely the same moment and likewise finish. This facilitates good cutting.

8. If dialogue is wrongly timed and so conflicts with a good cut, or if the cut is made difficult by actors speaking too quickly one to another, it is often possible to amend this by stopping the track at the cut and inserting blank film. Preliminary mouthings—those really belonging to the sentence just spoken in the previous shot—are often noticeable on the beginning of the new shot, at least for a few frames.
9. Never begin the first modulations of a new sound track sharp on the cut. Start your picture first for a few frames, as the brain does not work sufficiently quickly to follow two things at once, and the effect given is a jerky picture cut combined with wrong dialogue spacing.
10. In normal cases it is good to cut sharp on the last word of a sentence, possibly while the modulations are still in evidence, unless it is particularly desired to preserve a glance on the face of the speaker after he has spoken. This gives good *tempo*, by eliminating a feeling of superfluous footage.

11. If you are given individual close-ups try and make good use of them by the ancient method of back and forth, interchange of significant looks, reactions, etc.
12. Don't ignore the stunt or effect cut, both pictorial and "sonorous." If a violent movement is made, in the course of which the part of the body making the movement goes out of screen, cut to a wider shot. Cut on a door slam or other percussive sound. This is not a rule but simply an indication.
13. If the dialogue is too verbose and the same idea is achieved in half the words, do the dialogue writer's work and cut it for him (if the picture allows it, of course).
14. Finally, in the later stages of your picture, when you are attempting to infuse a bright, consistent *tempo*, remember that the true cut is probably the wrong one. It is not necessary for every perambulation round every room to be shown in detail. Hold the shot you are leaving just so long as it carries analytic interest, then sharp into the next shot into which the artists move, following the movement and creating a joint *tempo* between the two shots, by picking up that shot only at such points as meets your own requirements, irrespective of true movements in detail. Watch a Lubitsch picture and you will realise his wonderful economy of movement. Where the movement is not in itself a thing to feast on, he takes the artists out of one shot into the next, or out of one set into the next, or out of a set into a totally different location with a marvellous economy, so that the amount of movement he

gives becomes almost a shorthand symbol, quite acceptable to the audience, of the total movement.

We now have our sequence assembled, with due regard to production value, dramatic value, clarity and the panning and other camera tricks of the director. The cutter takes his day's work to the joining room, where it is cemented into two continuous rolls of celluloid. He then has it projected in the theatre, taking care to lock all the doors, and emerges a sad and despondent man. Only the thought of a wife and six children at home and the weekly pay-cheque prevents him from committing suicide while of unsound mind. After a cigarette in a friendly office he returns to his moviola, hitches the hated reel up and by detailed analysis of every cut decides where he has gone wrong. By the end of the revision he is feeling quite proud of himself again, and remains so until he sees his reel a second time, and this continues on and off until the picture is assembled.

By cutting behind floor-production it is usually possible to provide a passable assembly a few days after production ends. The cutter then shows his work to the director with certain qualms that prove to be amply justified by the director's constant exclamations of dismay. At the end there follows a long wrangle, after which the cutter returns in a nerve-wracked condition to the cutting-room, while the director retires to Monte Carlo. In the latter's absence the cutter makes such revisions as sheer celluloid permit and his conscience dictate. The film is then shown to an unofficial studio committee, after which there is a further riot. After making such changes as satisfy the susceptibilities of those present and taking advantage of the director's

continued absence in Monte Carlo, the cutter hastily shows the picture to the musical director, who forthwith starts to sketch the necessary musical background. These are timed absolutely to the second, and the skill required not only in musical technique but in knowledge of screen requirements is possessed by about one man in the whole of Great Britain.

The concluding stages of editing a picture are rather an anticlimax. Not only do many sections require music, but many more must have other sounds mixed into the existing track—train noises, motor-cars, aeroplanes, general background chatter, street noises and so forth. The film has to be broken up into innumerable small sections, the negative of the sound track cut to match, and some complicated manœuvres undertaken by the sound department. At length the music and additional sounds are dubbed, as it is called, on to the dialogue tracks, the film is reassembled into from seven to ten rolls of approximately 950 feet and the whole studio copy handed to the negative supervisor. Meanwhile, the latter's assistants have been breaking up and sorting about 150,000 feet of negative from which the necessary strips have to be discovered to match the master positive. This is done in an amazingly short time, checked and a combined sound and picture print made from the two negatives. There is very careful grading of both sound and picture negative and a different density of light may possibly be used at every cut.

I have probably said enough to put any reader off having any further thoughts of occupying himself in any such direction. Cutting consists, firstly, of working yourself limp, putting every possible fraction of interest from the material submitted to you into the picture;

and secondly, of thereupon cutting out every possible shot and part of a shot or incident that may be considered superfluous to the scope of that picture. You need the mind of a journalist, the temperament of a professor of philosophy, the tastes of an æsthetic, the manual dexterity of a juggler, the constitution of a hippopotamus and the devotion to duty and conscientiousness of a Boy Scout. If you can see your pet bit of cutting, over which you have spent hours, dismissed as butchery by the director and keep your sense of proportion, then you'll be a man, my son. But if this book is, as I believe, largely intended for the amateur, probably the readers will not find themselves in the unfortunate position of proving their manhood in this way.